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Curbing Plagiarism through Education:  
An On-going Practice

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Plagiarism is a term applied to the act of adopting someone else's thoughts or words as one's own without identifying their true source. If you was to look the word *plagiarize* up in a dictionary (1988), you would most likely find a definition similar to: “*to take (ideas, writings, etc.) from (another) and pass them off as one's own* (p. 1031).” Next to the word *plagiarize*, you might find *plagiarism* and *plagiary* and discover these associated with the words *kidnapper* and *thief*. Whereas the *p*-word itself may appear a strange and unfamiliar term, both its synonyms are familiar to us all.

Students all too often fall into the trap of cutting and pasting information from a variety of sources, tying them together with a few simple articles or intransitive verbs, and leaving the reader to assume the text is original and authentic. Sooner or later, someone reads the material and realizes someone else authored it earlier in another context or medium. Those caught using others materials are *plagiarists* and guilty of *plagiaristic* practices. Sometimes these were conducted on purpose. Other times it may have been a completely inadvertent oversight. Generally, both incidences can be easily avoided.

As educators, we are duty-bound to discourage inappropriate behaviors. At the beginning of each school year, we have parents and students sign any number of forms outlining discipline codes and policy agreements. One of these is the Acceptable Use Policy (AUP), which governs the appropriate use of school resources – especially those of a technological nature. Lamb (2006) points out that “AUPs provide guidelines for administrators, students, teachers, and parents” and help “to inform parents about the potential concerns regarding Internet resources (p.142)” and use of district technology. Unfortunately, all too often, we send a form home for mom and dad to sign. The intent is for parents to actually read what they agree to and for them to share the

information with their children. Sadly, parents are inundated with things to sign and simply scribble their respective rendition of John Hancock on whatever papers come from school trusting that they are somehow relevant and purposeful for their children's education. As educators, we are duty-bound to discourage plagiarism and other inappropriate practices. We need to take time to ensure AUP is understood. With all the technological advances in recent years, numerous means exist to reinforce the spirit and intent of a district's AUP in a meaningful and worthwhile format: interactive PowerPoint, Inspiration, WebQuests, beginning of year collaborative research writing assignment. The possibilities are bounded only by the teacher's imagination.

The *Education World* Website bills itself as "The Educator's Best Friend." A number of articles have appeared there which address the issue of plagiarism by students. In 2002, it published a *Student Guide to Avoiding Plagiarism* which outlines careful note taking, citing one's sources of information, and following a step-by-step writing process as essential keys to use. Hopkins (2003) provides a clear, "3-step" strategy for teaching students to paraphrase rather than plagiarize and outlines "five lessons" that instruct students in the art of effective note taking. Starr (2004) cites several online websites dealing with the problem of plagiarism and reports alarmingly high percentages of students who admit to the practice. One important comment she makes is that "in order to avoid plagiarism, students need to understand that the purpose of a research paper is to learn, to absorb information, internalize it, understand it, and explain it – not just to research and write it...They need to keep in mind that plagiarism occurs when a sequence of ideas is transferred from a source to a paper without the process of digestion, integration, and reordering in the writer's mind, and without acknowledgement in the paper (p.3)."

As early as 1999, Robert Harris (2004), a writer and educator, provided an on-line article describing numerous strategies for avoiding plagiarism in research papers. Harris states that “the availability (and accessibility) of textual material in electronic format has made plagiarism easier than ever (p. 1).” He discusses why students cheat; citing poor time management and planning skills, excessive number of assignment choices, fear their own writing skills are poor, risk-taking and rule breaking behaviors, or simply taking the path of least resistance. The problem is so pervasive that a website, *Plagiarism.org*, specifically dedicated to the restoration of online integrity has been developed. Its intended purpose is “to teach pre-emptive plagiarism education and help students develop quality writing and research skills.”

It is clear from the abundance of journal articles and online material, that plagiarism has become a common and pervasive problem at all levels of instruction. Agreeing with Harris’ view, Lamb (2006) states “with the introduction of CD-ROM, Internet, and word processing, copying and pasting has gotten even easier (p. 151).” She prescribes *Google* as a means to search for sample phrases educators may find questionable as to authorship. Other search engines, such as *Yahoo*, *MetaCrawler*, and *Dog Pile*, may also be effective sources for identifying non-authentic student writing samples.

## Resources

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